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HINTS ON

SOCIAL SERVICE

This pamphlet was compiled by a Committee of Home Rulers, who are now minutely studying problems of current interest to the Indian Nation. Suggestions and criticisms will be gratefully received by the Committee and they may be addressed to M. Subraya Kamath, 10, Esplanade, Madras.

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Hints on Social Service.

SOME SUGGESTIONS TO BEGINNERS.

The enthusiasm of young India for service to the Motherland forms the most encouraging characteristic of the present generation; young men are everywhere seen banding themselves into associations for social service and in some cities, we find more than half a dozen of them engaged side by side in uplifting the poor. This movement is however confined at present only to the urban parts, and in some instances to villages bordering on our cities. The rural population has yet to obtain its blessings. The following suggestions are put forward with such expansion in view, and they are based on the hypothesis that the persons who take the initiative, mainly College Students, will be at the scene of activities for only a short period of the year—two to three months. Several young Home Rulers have expressed a desire to utilise their vacations for such service if a definite plan is placed before them, and these notes are intended primarily for their information.

The Night School.

It will probably shock most of our readers if we do not begin with the night school. That is the most common type of institution which social workers establish in the first flush of enthusiasm. They are badly needed in India to meet several of our national requirements. Illiteracy forms the strongest obstacle in the way of our progress and to break it is the best service which every night school is expected to do. It can be utilised for several other purposes and a pupil often derives, at any rate can be made to derive, more benefit from them than from a very perfectory knowledge of the "three Rs" which our night schools commonly give.

To start a night school, the best method is to hold small street meetings at various parts of the locality from which the students are expected and there to explain to them briefly how the proposed school would improve their position in life. Please be explicit in explaining that point and it can be easily done. Explain how because of illiteracy, they have to depend on others for every trifling act such as the writing of a post card or the knowledge of its contents, or for knowing the latest news, or for reading pamphlets on such subjects as agriculture or any occupation of theirs. If you are confident, you can promise them a small useful library and a reading room which they will, however, be able to use only after breaking down illiteracy. Next explain how some of the subjects to be tought in the school could be useful to them in every day life.

If you cannot be a regular teacher, employ one who will see that the classes are held daily except on days of festival. Buy also a few slates and books; but only if you cannot induce the pupils to buy them, in which case they are likely to be more attentive. Make arrangements to have two or three classes according to the attainments of the pupils; and divide the curriculum thus: Half the working hours for the vernacular and arithmetic; and the other half for some special instruction. [See Note A.]

Remember always the proverb. "well begun is half done." Nowhere is it so true as in the case of night schools. If at the end of a week, the boys find that the school has not been useful, your efforts are almost wasted, Be also very regular and punctual. It any of your acts make them feel you are indifferent, they will lose their enthusiasm.

The opening of the school must always be in the strict Hindu fashion. That alone will appeal to them. Have a puja followed by the distribution of sweets. Begin teaching in the old Indian style; else the elder men will be displeased. There is ample time for following the latest methods of teaching after you have once won their goodwill. After beginning instruction, get some worthy of your place to address a few words to those assembled and follow him up

with a practical speech, so that when the first day's work is over the pupils may feel that it is worth attending the school.

The hours of attendance may well be fixed at two daily; if you can, have them at two and a half, preferably from 6 to 8·30 P.M. Make the first period the most interesting, and thus induce greater punctuality. If you can, be at the school—which must be as near the quarters of the pupils as possible, if not in their very midst—half an hour or twenty minutes before the opening hour and spend it in chatting with them on their difficulties or their needs, or on the latest strange events in the neighbourhood or in the world. The war will give you endless topics—the submarines, the aeroplanes, the big guns, the flame throwers and all those engines of destruction.

The first period, extending to fifteen minutes, may be taken up with prayer followed by a sermon, mainly as a story. The next two periods of 45 minutes each may be for vernacular and arithmetic and the last for the special subject to which the special attention of every worker is drawn. The special subject must be some topic of interest to the pupils and one such subject must be taught every working day for a week or a fortnight by the same person. Then another, then a third and so on. The following are suggested merely to indicate their nature :

(1) Human anatomy with special reference to the functions and delicate nature of the organs.

(2) Usual causes of bodily distemper, drinking water; exposure ; dampness etc.

(3) Epidemics. How they spread and how they can be controlled. [The teacher of this subject must be a very discreet person and ought not to ridicule popular notions. His arguments must appeal instead of his invectives or sarcasms.]

(4) Caste and knowledge. [The teacher should try to make it clear that knowledge is not the heritage of any class; and all can be great if they try.]

(5) Economic condition : suggestions derived from the knowledge of the status of the pupils : what can be done to

improve it; the ways that are open and that may be opened; agricultural improvement : co-operation : abandonment of adulteration etc.

(6) Life and doings of Saints, preferably any belonging to the class of all or some of the pupils.

Other topics will suggest themselves to the reader. What is emphasised most is the necessity for daily and continual instruction every day, until the pupils get a fairly good knowledge of it. It is wasteful to have one period a week or two, since no text books are available or even if they are available, the pupils may not find it possible to follow the instructions given. And special instruction of this type is by far the best contribution which a night school can make to the progress of its pupils. If capable and informed teachers are available, half the working period of the school may advantageously be utilised for such special instruction.

The Co-operative Movement.

The usefulness of a young man in the field of Co-operation may be in either of these three ways: strengthening an existing Co-operative Society; (2) extending its benefits to lines other than those in operation or opening of new societies; and (3) the starting of a fresh society, the very first in the village. Before explaining what can be done in all these ways, it may be useful to state briefly how essential is the spread of the Co-operative movement in India. The main industry of every village is agriculture and Co-operation can effect its improvement in many ways. The farmer may get money to improve his lands, say by digging a well or by buying a pair of bulls; he may pay away his old debts and save a lot of worry and money thereby; he can get better seeds or better manure; an advance on his harvest may enable him to sell his grain when the market is favourable.

Since we assume that the organiser will be staying only for two or three months in the village, scope for useful work is greatest in the first direction indicated above. The Co-operative movement in this province is very weak in the

matter of funds and an educated young Indian will not find it hard to induce one or two rich or middle class men to deposit more money. The greater the deposits the more favourable will be his opportunity to effect other improvements. He must see whether any money lenders are working against the society; whether there is internal dissention among the members; whether the Panchayat is all that is desirable. In fact, study the condition of the society with an impartial mind and see what you can do to remedy the defects.

Next consider whether you cannot extend its activities. Is the society buying good seed for distribution among the members and buying manure for the same? Is it advancing money to the ryot to enable him to postpone the sale of his produce soon after harvest? The reader is probably aware that India is now parting with a large portion of her raw produce very soon after the harvest when the foreign market is generally at its worst. The postponement of sale by two or three months will sometimes secure to the ryot 25 per cent more money and the main bulk of it will come from the foreigner. The best way to effect that is as follows: The Co-operative society must have a small granary of its own in which must be stored the corn on which the ryot takes the advance. When the market grows better, the corn is sold, the Co-operative Society gets its money, interest and rent, and the farmer a decent sum of money.

If the existing society is not willing to take up such further activities, see whether you cannot get a separate society organised for any one of them. In that case, secure the Co-operation of those who are acquainted with the working of the existing society.

It is a somewhat difficult task to start a new society in a village, the inhabitants of which are not acquainted with its advantages or ways of working; but remember that in all of these undertakings nothing is impossible if you are prepared to exert to the required extent. In undertaking the organisation of any new society, the following departmental instructions may prove useful:

"It should be borne in mind that co-operative societies are strictly business concerns and all work taken up must yield a profit to the societies, independently of the advantages and profit which may accrue to their members. They cannot undertake agricultural propaganda work for its own sake. Caution should be exercised in recommending a co-operative society to undertake any work which will not be actually productive of profit to the society as a society even where it may de profitable to the members. Therefore before recommending the formation of a society enquiry should be made as to what profit-producing work the society will begin with, and how that work will bring it a profit.

"If a society was proposed to be formed for the purchase and supply to its members of manures, seeds and implements it would be necessary to enquire whether these supplieswere at present obtained by individual landholders from a distance what is the present approximate value of the trade in them, what prospects of expansion there are and what distinct profit to the society may be expected from co-operative action. So also where the joint sale of produce is contemplated, it should be ascertained whether the produce refered to is raised only for local consumption or is one for sale at a distant market, and whether there is a large trade in it likely to realise a profit to the society, and whether the society has facilities for storing it and what that will cost. In joint sale of produce there is more likelihood of profit in dealing with commercial crops like ground-nut, cotton, etc., than with crops raised only for consumption locally or in the near neighbour hood. But even commercial products unless grown on a large area may not be of sufficient volume to warrant any expectation of profit or to give an opening for co-operative work.

"As there is an element of trade in co-operative societies organised for the above purposes, the business will have to be managed carefully and with much shrewdness and tact. The particular kinds of articles and requisites to be purchased, the seasons when they should be purchased, so also the seasons and markets for sale of produce are all matters of experience. Such advice and help as the Agricultural

Department can give in these matters will be available, but the success of the societies will mainly depend on the business capacity of the managing body of the society. It is therefore necessary to make sure that fairly capable men will be available to undertake the management of the work. It does not need to be pointed out that the work to be done will be somewhat more complex than that of an ordinary *Credit* society.

"To acquire the necessary experience and to ensure the growth of work on a successful basis, it is advisable that the operations of a society should be restricted to a small area and that the society should concentrate its attention on only one or two definite items of work. This has been the secret of the success of some of the societies which are doing profitable work in other Provinces.

"Even in selecting a single village for forming a co-operative society in it, care should be taken to see whether there is any opening in it for co-operative work. Villages remote from railways, and difficult of access, with requirements of small volume cannot afford openings for profitable co-operative work, and great care must be taken to see that the villages and areas selected for organisation are suitable for gaining profit to the societies.

"The villages and areas, most suitable for forming societies in, are those where there are particular needs which affect or appeal to all or a large majority of the members, and are of immediate importance to the actual local agriculture of the tracts or villages. For instance, places where all or a large majority of the members concerned want particular articles in common and in fairly large quantities, or places where certain products are raised by all or most of the members, which they have to send to a distant market for sale and where the agricultural practices are similar, will afford fair chances for successful co-operative organisation.

"It follows from the above that for both gaining experience and success in their operations, the societies should centre attention, at any rate in the earlier stages, on

one or two specific objects common to all they members. The work should be fairly simple.

"Co-operative Agricultural Societies when the are started should have at their disposal fairly sufficient capital to accomplish their work, and they should all be formed on the limited liability basis as most of the members are likely to be also members of Co-operative Credit Societies with unlimited liability and for the restricted purposes of Agricultural Co-operation, unlimited liability is not necessary."

Panchayats.

Beyond these two we do not think it possible to suggest any definite schemes of work for the simple reason that what may be done depends on the conditions prevailing in the village. We would suggest that in every case, the object of the social servant must be to see in what direction it can be of use to the people and as far as possible to best advantages, specially in rural parts to undertake work in which you are sure of the co-operation of the Government Official. Tentatively, however, we would suggest the following schemes. If there is not a Panchayat in your village, it is well you ask yourself why there is not one, and if you care, influence your villagers to see that one is started at an early date. Try your best to have a formal and not an informal Panchayat, because in the case of the formal alone is success more or less sure. If you succeed in that endeavour, then try and interest the Panchayats at once in the work of village importance and let us remind you again that "well-begun is half-done." If you influence the Panchayat sufficiently to begin work on a very efficient scale, there is every chance of its keeping on very well even after you leave the scene of activities. You may influence the Panchayats to take greater care of the sources of water-supply and, if possible, get together all the villagers to cleanse the common tank or the common well. Next, see whether you cannot influence them to improve the village roads or to clear the prickly pear. These are, of course, rather difficult operations; but once if you succeed in putting them on the right track, everything is likely to go on very well. Next to the Panchayat and if

possible after organising it, see whether your village has a day school. If there is not one, try to organise it, and if there is, take the best possible measures to strengthen it by all means. The day school will prove useful in many ways. It will form a great scene of interest for all the villagers, something like a temple of the olden days. Finally, we will suggest to your consideration the necessity to introduce what perhaps may best be called "the new awakening." Stir up the life of the village to the best of your power by giving them new ideas and by acquainting them with the latest phase of the National life. A few mass meetings held either for social or religious or economic purposes will almost work wonders. They will create a considerable bond of unity, and they will rouse enthusiasm which if you are careful and on the watch, you can divert to useful lines. The value of mass meetings cannot be exaggerated in these days. You may have first to face some ridicule and even opposition. But if you are determined to make a strong effort, to face the ridicule, we have no doubt the village will soon be grateful to you for that courage. The worst feature of village life at the present moment is its dormant condition. There is hardly any event of stirring importance except a murder or a dacoity, and so long as such a condition continues, no work of public utility can be undertaken.

Sanitation.

Reference has already been made to what can be done in the matter of improving the sanitation of the village. We are not confident that much can be done in that line without the co-operation of the Panchayat, unless of course the social servant happens to belong to an influential family of the village. With the Panchayat to assist you, it should be possible to clean the source or sources of water supply, ensure their better protection from contamination, to fill up small marshes or other places breeding mosquitoes. What is more feasible is imparting a knowledge of sanitation to the pupils of the night school and thus turn them into so many agents to carry on your sanitary propaganda. The opportunity in that direction is surely great and you will do well to

have one or two subjects of sanitary importance as topics of special study for the school. You may teach them the importance of a pure supply of drinking water, of daily bath, or clean house surroundings. The magic lantern will be very useful but we doubt very much whether it is within the means of many social servants to buy not only the lantern but also the slides. Whatever be the means adopted to teach the sanitary subjects, care must be taken to see that the lessons are not lost on the pupils but that an effort is made to translate them into action.

One more suggestion we venture to put forward here. The need for libraries and reading rooms is very keen in our villages and such temples of knowledge are essential alongside the night school. In organising them care should be taken to collect funds that will be adequate at least for one year and even a hundred books with two or three periodicals will satisfy the needs of a small village. A reading room will evoke much enthusiasm as soon as it is started but it is hard to keep it up, specially if the collection of subscriptions should be a monthly operation. If the villagers will gather there in the evenings and if care be taken to collect the subscriptions however small once a year or half year, the villagers may be expected to keep up the institution even in the absence of the temporary organiser.

Some Useful Don'ts.

Finally, we desire it necessary to impress upon all social workers not to court certain dangers which, from what we have observed at Madras and elsewhere, seem to be too very common pitfalls.

First, there are a few persons, generally going by the name of experts who ask us to make a deep and age long study of social conditions before you begin any work. Our suggestion is that very little such study is necessary to make a good beginning, and when such a beginning is made—necessarily on an humble scale, there will be plenty of time to make observations. Please do not waste time in needless and often meaningless inquiries. Thanks to that perverted advice, several young men in Madras have been lead to waste

months of precious time and no tangible results of any character have been secured. In fact, on an examination of some of the laborious work to which the young men were put, one finds it difficult to avoid the conclusion that they were criminally misled—either intentionally or otherwise. Of course, it is dangerous to make a very ambitions beginning unless the beginner is sure of copious support, mainly financial.

Secondly, please take care not to displease the village elders. Try to pursuade them slowly into your modes of thinking—at least don't insult or redicule them under any circumstances. If you cannot win them to your side, it does not matter much. Don't range them against you.

Thirdly, do not assume superior airs. Always mix with the villagers on equal terms. Several educated young men, who express great sympathy with the social service movement, find it hard to conceal their disgust at the ways of the villagers. It may be that the latter are untidy or even unclean or ignorant, it may be that you are a very great person; but still if you desire to work among villagers, please give up all such ideas of superiority.

Some other "dont's" have already been mentioned and we shall not repeat them here. Most of them will suggest themselves the moment you begin work. The suggestions here put forward are like those which a person intending to learn swiming obtains as he decends into water. The social servant has to learn the most essential facts only after he begins the operations, and if he has the necessary enthusiasm, courage and patriotism, one single youth can transform the whole life of a village almost beyond recognition and make it a true unit of the New India that is now dawning in this great land.

VANDE MATARAM.

APPENDICES.

Note A.—The reader will have seen that no provision is made in the curricula of the night school for teaching English. We do not think English need be taught in rural schools and to them alone pertain our suggestions. Schools in towns and cities *must* teach English, in fact that must be the main subject. Knowledge of English counts a great deal in large cities and a workman possessing it will generally earn at least 25 per cent. more than his brother workman without it.

Note B.—Cooperative Societies may be started for the following purposes: (1) Credit (2) Wholesale purchase of seed, manure or any other article of common use among the members, (3) Sale of common produce, (4) Production of a common requirement instead of buying it; and (5) Insuring cattle. Societies intended for credit purposes may extend their operations to any other line such as the supply of manure, but a seperate, if possible an allied society, will serve the purpose better.

Note C.—Cooperation of Government officials must be sought for in establishing Panchayats. It will be of use in bringing round the local officials if they be perverse and will also add to the prestige of the new institution. No Panchayet is likely to thrive if Government officials view it with disfavour.